

# The Transnational Life and Death of Peter Kropotkin, 1881-1921: Terrorism, the Anarchist Body, and the Russian Revolution

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## ABSTRACT

Peter Kropotkin's life was not only transnational because of his movements. Kropotkin existed as an imagined figure in the sphere of transatlantic Anglophone print culture. This imagined Kropotkin was both representative of and contributed to British and American responses to the Russian Revolution in the period between 1881, when Kropotkin first became internationally infamous, and his death in 1921. This article argues that we can read in media representations of Kropotkin three main phases of revolutionary history. The first, the terrorist phase. The second, the ancient dignity of Russian culture. The third, decay, death, and despair. Kropotkin was one of the Revolution's greatest celebrities, meaning that when the Civil War emerged and Bolshevik power grew, it was through memories and representations of him that British and American audiences interpreted the Russian Revolution. So far as they saw it, Kropotkin was the Revolution, and had been for some time. As a result, Kropotkin's death marked an important moment both for Russian anarchists, but also a symbol of the passing of an age of Russian history and culture.

**Keywords:** *Peter Kropotkin, Sofia Kropotkina, Russian Revolution, terrorism, transnational history, media history*

## INTRODUCTION

Peter Kropotkin died on 8 February 1921 in Dmitrov, a small town not far from Moscow. His funeral, held on 13 February, was marked by the march of a crowd of

twenty thousand from the Moscow Labour Temple where he had lain in state to the Novodevichy Cemetery.<sup>2</sup> Emma Goldman spoke at his graveside and remarked in her memoirs:

The funeral was a most impressive sight. It was a unique demonstration never witnessed in any other country. Long lines of members of Anarchist organizations, labour unions, scientific and literary societies and student bodies marched for over two hours from the Labour Temple to the burial place, seven versts [nearly five miles] distant. The procession was headed by students and children carrying wreaths presented by various organizations. Anarchist banners of black and scarlet Socialist emblems floated above the multitude. The mile-long procession entirely dispensed with the services of the official guardians of the peace. Perfect order was kept by the multitude itself spontaneously forming in several rows, while students and workers organized a live chain on both sides of the marchers. Passing the Tolstoi Museum the cortege paused, and the banners were lowered in honour of the memory of another great son of Russia. A group of Tolstoians on the steps of the Museum rendered Chopin's Funeral March as an expression of their love and reverence for Kropotkin.<sup>3</sup>

Like many anarchists, including Kropotkin, Goldman had been enthusiastic about Russia's future after the end of tsarist rule with the February Revolution of 1917. She returned to Russia after her deportation from the US in 1919. Kropotkin's funeral was an important event for anarchists like Goldman in Russia, who were struggling in opposition to the growing power of the Bolshevik regime. It seemed that permitting the funeral marked a new approach towards anarchists. Imprisoned anarchists persuaded Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership that they be released in order to attend, with the promise that they would return.<sup>4</sup> But this dream was never realised. Anarchists were soon being arrested in greater numbers than before, some were deported, and the movement was crushed.<sup>5</sup> Kropotkin's funeral was the last great moment of the anarchist movement in Russia.

If Kropotkin's death marked the passing of an era of anarchist revolutionary activism, to foreigners observing the events in Russia it symbolised the changing character of the Revolution. Over the previous four decades, Kropotkin had become an important symbol of the Russian revolutionary movement abroad, coming to both embody and personify the Revolution. He had worked tirelessly for the Russian revolutionary cause, supporting colleagues with varied political leanings, but sharing the goal of liberating Russia from tsarist rule.<sup>6</sup> His ideas fascinated foreign intellectuals and activists, and his sympathisers included those on the left as well as more

moderate liberals.<sup>7</sup> While the impact of Kropotkin's ideas is clear in his intellectual exchanges with both anarchists and other figures, the sheer size of the archives of his correspondence and the variety of individuals with whom he corresponded indicate his broad cultural and political significance.<sup>8</sup>

This is not a transnational biography of Kropotkin. Examining existing biographies such as Martin A. Miller's establishes that Kropotkin's life can be considered transnational in the same way that recent biographies of other Russian revolutionaries have shown that individuals' transnational mobility and personal networks highlight continuities between revolutionary movements and groups over time.<sup>9</sup> Miller's work draws deeply on Kropotkin's personal archive and to re-examine these materials through an explicitly transnational lens is not necessary. Neither is this an intellectual biography. Caroline Cahm's intellectual biography of Kropotkin has demonstrated how his thought looked beyond the national context.<sup>10</sup> The transnational nature of Kropotkin's publishing work, involving journals such as *La Révolte* and *Freedom*, attests to the transnational impact of his ideas.<sup>11</sup> Scholars of political ideas have already established that the scope of anarchist political activism and thought was fundamentally transnational in this period.<sup>12</sup>

Instead, this is a study of the versions of Kropotkin that existed in the transatlantic, Anglophone media imagination. These representations and the changes they underwent reflected changing attitudes to the Russian revolutionary movement, and revolutionary terrorism as a prominent element of it. Kropotkin was one of the Russian Revolution's original international celebrities in whom foreign sympathisers invested their hopes for a new society, not only in Russia but beyond. The Russian Revolution acquired its meaning for foreign audiences through its mediation. Therefore, this study examines the three main representations of Kropotkin in Anglophone media: the dangerous terrorist; the anarchist prince, or grandfather of the revolution; and the dying body of the revolution. This study builds on research by cultural historians of terrorism, who have demonstrated that modern media technologies are an important element of what we might call 'modern terrorism', allowing it to become a powerful social and cultural force.<sup>13</sup> This study therefore considers the media constructs of modern revolution and revolutionary political thought as important elements of these phenomena beyond the events themselves.

This study necessitates using newspaper articles in digital repositories, even though such repositories inevitably contain significant silences and omissions.<sup>14</sup> Digitisation amplifies existing silences in archival collections through processes of selection, funding, and 'black box' technologies.<sup>15</sup> To avoid problematic quantitative analysis of language, this study qualitatively analyses results of searches for Kropotkin's name. Although searches de-contextualise results, this research also

considers the publications' politics, owners, and audiences.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, digital repositories enable greater research into the historical role of the press than was previously possible, when newspapers and periodicals are seen in the context of wider cultural encounters.<sup>17</sup> No collection is comprehensive; for example, commercial publishers seek to market, and libraries to acquire, well-known titles. However, this article also uses free databases such as *Chronicling America*, which focuses on materials unlikely to have been digitised by other organisations.<sup>18</sup> The range of local and national publications I have been able to access represent a range of examples, both general and of specific relevant locations such as Chicago.<sup>19</sup> Titles available are principally more long-lived and mainstream than local and national newspapers. However, their longevity aids in identifying broader long-term trends.

National and local newspapers of varying political leanings all reported on Kropotkin, with similarities emerging across the political spectrum, including in the London papers the *Daily Telegraph* (conservative) and *Daily News* (liberal) and provincial newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* (liberal). In the US, commercial interests came to supersede strictly partisan affiliations in this period.<sup>20</sup> Though the political fabric of print culture was complex, broad trends emerge when studying newspapers as part of a large, transnational corpus. Kropotkin's appearance in sensational stories of violence and conspiracy echoed many characteristics of the New Journalism of the fin de siècle.<sup>21</sup> The period when Kropotkin was assumed to be a dangerous terrorist stimulated the most articles, in which this assumption dominated. In his later years, Kropotkin's vocal sympathisers often held liberal political leanings, but he appealed to a wide section of society, and sympathetic reporting appeared in a range of publications.<sup>22</sup> Qualitative approaches to search results from the large corpus also enable investigation of marginalised topics. This article also examines the media image of Sofia Kropotkina, Peter Kropotkin's wife, but also a lecturer and activist in her own right.

Given commercial interests on which these publications' longevity relied, this article sees newspapers as both voicing extant public opinion and seeking to shape public discourse for political and social goals. A publication's prioritisation of politics could also, however, be 'compatible' with commercial success.<sup>23</sup> The newspaper, and not Kropotkin's books, the publications such as *Le Révolté* which he edited, his articles in literary and political periodicals, his lectures, was also the site in which a wider public was likely to encounter Kropotkin. The dominance of certain trends in representations of Kropotkin in the press can, therefore, indicate broader trends in the reception of Kropotkin. Although they framed and shared information about Kropotkin, newspapers cannot be assumed to constitute public opinion. As Kate Jackson notes, Victorian periodicals 'are no longer deemed mere *reflective evidence* through which to *recover* the culture that they *mirror*'.<sup>24</sup> The

transnational nature of the issues in representations of Kropotkin, however, created a role for the contemporary newspaper lying between what Jürgen Habermas saw as the idealised liberal newspaper as public sphere and the banal print culture of commercialisation.<sup>25</sup> Persecution, oppression, and starvation abroad were more easily framed as unifying moral issues and representations of Kropotkin echoed numerous contemporary British and American humanitarian campaigns on Russian issues.<sup>26</sup> In this case, print culture became an agent of oppositional public opinion, albeit in opposition to a foreign government. Liberal newspaper proprietors' own politics often shaped these efforts and, regarding Kropotkin, are evident in the case of C.P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. The paper was, like others, initially hostile towards Kropotkin, but its stance soon softened, aligning with Scott's sympathies with Russia's movements for political reform. Scott was a notable member of the English Society of Friends of Russian Freedom in the 1890s and Harold Williams later became the newspaper's first Russian correspondent at the end of 1904, cementing the newspaper's links to the Russian liberal movement and providing readers not only with the 'facts', but also a liberal-leaning interpretation.<sup>27</sup> The shift in representations in this case suggests that even if the newspaper cannot be a source of public opinion, newspaper proprietors certainly felt readers would be receptive to these changing messages. Therefore, while the newspaper cannot provide a definitive source of public opinion, in the case of Kropotkin, it can give an indication of shifting popular representation and reception over time.

The first section of this article will examine Kropotkin's public image in the Anglophone foreign press in the early years of his international fame between the London anarchist congress of the summer of 1881 and his trial and imprisonment in France in the winter of 1882-3. It will argue that depictions of Kropotkin fed demand for news and fuelled fear of the spread of revolutionary violence from Russia. In this period, terrorism became the dominant representation of the Russian revolutionary movement in Anglophone culture establishing a link which endured to 1917 and beyond. I will argue that Kropotkin's presence abroad was perceived as a threat, a potential source of infection with dangerous, 'foreign' ideas. The second section will explore the period to 1917, when Kropotkin remained associated with terrorism, but British and American views of Russian revolutionary terrorists became more sympathetic. In this period, Kropotkin established himself as an expert on the Russian revolutionary movement and various cultural and social issues. This article will argue that protecting Kropotkin's physical body became, over the course of his life in emigration, an important symbolic act of protecting the revolution and its political ideals, an act which took on greater symbolic meaning after the October Revolution of 1917 and the growth of Bolshevik power in Russia. The final section will explore

the period between the February Revolution of 1917 and Kropotkin's death in 1921, highlighting the importance of Kropotkin in foreign observers' interpretations of revolutionary events in Russia in this period of great upheaval and violence in Russia and the emergence of Bolshevik rule. Kropotkin's passing represented the passing of a revolutionary age and marked the formation of a new mindset in global revolutionary activism response to the Russian revolution. 1917 tempered the ideals of many activists.<sup>28</sup> Kropotkin's death only compounded the sense of loss. By examining the roles imagined Kropotkins played as representations of a lost revolutionary heritage, we can see the roots of contemporary leftist perspectives on statism and Marxism.

## A DANGEROUS TERRORIST

Kropotkin's physical presence abroad was initially a source of alarm. By the time Kropotkin first became internationally infamous, as a participant in the 'Anarchist Congress' in London in the summer of 1881, anarchists and Russian revolutionaries appeared delusional and dangerous. That year, terrorism seemed an omnipresent threat.<sup>29</sup> In the wake of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March, the participation of Russians in the congress threatened the spread of such acts beyond the Russian borders. Moreover, the émigré German journalist Johann Most had recently been arrested in London for celebrating the tsar's assassination in his newspaper *Freiheit*, Irish revolutionaries were conducting a bombing campaign in England and on 19 September, the US president James A. Garfield would finally die following an assassination attempt. Against this background, participants in the congress discussed the controversial, among both anarchists and other revolutionaries, strategy of 'propaganda by the deed'. When Kropotkin supposedly 'applauded the assassination of several Russian generals' in a speech, he only contributed to the sense that anarchists were inherently violent.<sup>30</sup> The appearance of news about the congress in US newspapers indicates that while this meeting took place in Britain, it was perceived as a transatlantic threat. Anarchists discussing such tactics seemed to threaten civilisation itself, even though little evidence suggests leading anarchist thinkers were involved in terrorist plots.<sup>31</sup> As a result, exaggerated contemporary fears of anarchist terrorism can be attributed in part to sensationalist journalism.<sup>32</sup>

In contemporary popular discourse, anarchists were rarely considered to be real people.<sup>33</sup> The anarchist body became the subject of caricature. They were popularly represented as 'hairy', reflecting contemporary cultural concerns regarding moral and physical degeneration, and echoing the ape-like caricatures of Irish revolutionaries in the British press.<sup>34</sup> Kropotkin was the archetypal foreign anarchist bogeyman. Even the more radical liberal newspaper the *Manchester Guardian* described him, and all

anarchists, as 'quite mad' and commented on the shape of his head in strange terms: 'his bald head shoots up at the back to a cone-shaped crown'.<sup>35</sup> However, he was also threatening because he did not look like an anarchist caricature:

[h]e stood in the midst of a group of other Revolutionists, but his calm, earnest face and simple attire at once attracted attention to him. On his left stood a vivacious Mexican, clad in garments illustrative of the latest Parisian fashion, while close beside him was an Italian, whose sunken bloodshot eyes, pale features, and shirt torn open to the waist, were not needed to indicate that he had risen from a bed of sickness to assist in the upheaval of the red flag. The savage expression glittering in the eyes of the latter, and the Mexican's feverish animation, threw into strange contrast the immovable attitude of the man in black.<sup>36</sup>

Anarchism provided a focal point for fears about modernity, urbanisation, and social inequality.<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin was a visible figurehead of anarchism, yet if even he could travel in disguise (the *Manchester Guardian* speculated he might have visited Russia since fleeing), then the unknown, invisible anarchism seemed more threatening.<sup>38</sup> Kropotkin's charisma also became a potential threat. One report of his trial in France in 1883 noted that '[i]t seemed at one time as if not the President [of the court] but the Prince was directing the proceedings', suggesting Kropotkin's charisma was also problematic.<sup>39</sup> Kropotkin, therefore, constituted a multi-faceted threat in the eyes of foreign observers: he was anarchism in the guise of respectability. Significantly, this treatment of Kropotkin in the press was also common across liberal and conservative leaning newspapers, including the more radical liberal *Manchester Guardian*, which would later be more consistently sympathetic towards Kropotkin. This suggests that fear of Kropotkin as a facilitator of anarchist violence and transnational terrorism was widespread in 1881.

As well as being the year of the tsar's assassination and Most's arrest for championing it, 1881 was also the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commune and many Communards had been released in an amnesty the previous year. The French Revolution and republican conspiracy were fertile ground for nineteenth-century British satire, as were figures perceived to be fomenting revolution among the working classes such as Henry Hunt, the famous orator of the St Peter's Field's massacre.<sup>40</sup> The violence that had erupted both in pursuit and defence of the Commune reverberated in Anglophone literary and popular culture.<sup>41</sup> The attendance of the Communard Louise Michel propelled the congress to the attention of the press: '[Michel] announced a second golden age, and urged her hearers not to spare their blood in bringing it about'. Another speaker condemned Most's recent

conviction for 'justifiable expression of opinion, and declared that if any one were to be hanged for inciting to murder it should be the editors of these English journals which called for the murder of the people'.<sup>42</sup> Kropotkin only seemed more threatening by association with Most and Michel, whom the *Manchester Guardian* called 'a conspicuous preacher of the gospel of destruction'.<sup>43</sup> He appeared to be exporting 'Russian' terrorism and Michel, the violence of the Commune. Newspapers reacted incredulously: 'It will occur to most people that such a congress of Nihilist revolutionaries and dynamite assassins ought somehow to have been interfered with by a British Government awake to its national and international position'.<sup>44</sup>

By participating in prominent events such as this congress and by writing articles published in English, Kropotkin sustained his association with Russian revolutionary terrorism. While he did not openly encourage terrorism, he attempted to correct misconceptions that Russians used terrorism indiscriminately and disproportionately and noted that 'the majority of the educated men of wealthy classes' had sympathised with the assassination of the tsar in 1881.<sup>45</sup> Kropotkin's biographers and other historians have disputed Kropotkin's personal views on terrorism.<sup>46</sup> Jim McLaughlin emphasises that Kropotkin did not reject all violence, but believed that violence alone would not be productive as the people needed to believe in building a new future and activists should not seek to incite others to violence.<sup>47</sup> However, his commentary in English was broadly sympathetic of past acts of terrorism in Russia, which was more significant in influencing public opinion of him than his precise views. A contrast can be identified here in the difference between widespread representations of Kropotkin in newspapers and the responses of radicals who were genuinely interested in his social, political, and revolutionary thought.<sup>48</sup>

Compounding this, just a month after the 1881 congress, Kropotkin was expelled from Switzerland, which, according to the *New York Times*, 'ceased to be a safe retreat for Nihilists and other political agitators of the violent and murderous type'.<sup>49</sup> This use of the term nihilist illustrates difficulties obstructing computational text analysis. 'Anarchist' and 'nihilist' (both capitalised and not) often implied a terrorist. The pejorative term nihilist to refer to Russian revolutionaries derived from Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862). When used to describe Kropotkin in 1881, it implied support for terrorism: 'he has been the most energetic of the Nihilist fraternity ... His articles in the *Révolution* of which he is both editor and proprietor, were such that no government could tolerate'.<sup>50</sup> While nihilist became a catch-all term for Russian revolutionaries, terrorists of other nationalities were widely called anarchists, just as revolutionaries holding a variety of anti-authoritarian views had been for several centuries.<sup>51</sup> Kropotkin, being Russian and an anarchist in the theoretical sense, seemed to epitomise the fear of foreign violence.

An international press sensation erupted on news of Kropotkin's arrest in Thonon in the French Alps in December 1882. Newspapers asserted that he had incited 'murder and pillage' or 'pillage and assassination'.<sup>52</sup> Anarchism's anti-statism intensified fears of the movement as it was seen to threaten social and political order. Shortly before Kropotkin's arrest, rumours circulated that an imagined terrorist conspiracy, the 'National Revolutionary League', was supposedly operating in England, involving Kropotkin and Michel, with an anonymous but supposedly famous 'Radical' leader, who reportedly declared:

There are circumstances under which political assassination is justifiable and necessary, and when murder is no crime. We must have anarchy before we have peace and order; we must have revolution before we can have law; we want to do away with all existing institutions and overthrow all Governments, because they are opposed to the wishes and welfare of the people.<sup>53</sup>

A rumour that Kropotkin controlled an international terrorist conspiracy was already well established before his arrest in December 1882 and was discussed at his trial.<sup>54</sup> Though Kropotkin was never at any time a terrorist leader in practice, the press ascribed him this role because of his connections with revolutionaries using terrorism. The transnational scope of Kropotkin's visions of liberation can hardly have helped him in this regard. Just as newspapers had criticised the London anarchist congress in 1881, at the time of his arrest, they accused Kropotkin of abusing the right of asylum in France and Switzerland.<sup>55</sup>

Critics condemned Kropotkin's links to working-class activists. Journalists criticised his speech at a public meeting in Lyons and for supposedly encouraging unrest, as well as linking him to the French police's seizure in November 1882 of revolutionary manifestos encouraging violence and providing the 'minutest description of the manufacturing of dynamite, lithofractor, picrate, nitro-glycerine and ammoniacal powder'.<sup>56</sup> Giving workers the knowledge of manufacturing explosives meant that 'a discarded workman or servant might take it into his head to take summary vengeance on his employer by destroying his premises and himself by dynamite, nitro-glycerine or gun-cotton'.<sup>57</sup> Fears of the poor armed with self-manufactured explosives were reiterated in times of crisis, such as during the 1892 famine in Russia.<sup>58</sup> The furore around Kropotkin's arrest illustrates the negative associations of working-class terrorism, whereas, alone, he was a curio: 'the incongruity of Kropotkin's princely status and intemperate political views' brought him much attention.<sup>59</sup> Kropotkin's potential to infect and disturb order was further reflected in newspaper reports concerning the conditions in which he was held after his arrest:

even the police in charge of him were not allowed to speak to him and he was kept isolated.<sup>60</sup>

In his memoirs, Kropotkin depicted the trial and the ‘evidence’ provided by the prosecution as farce.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the image of Kropotkin the dangerous terrorist predominated transnationally around the time of the trial. Local circumstances also perpetuated these narratives long after it had dissipated elsewhere. Kropotkin’s role in commemorating the Chicago Martyrs, the anarchists executed for the 1886 bombing at the city’s Haymarket, was one example where local outrage fuelled criticism. Contemporaries and historians have widely seen the trial as a serious miscarriage of justice, with the anarchists not responsible for the deaths and injuries the bomb caused.<sup>62</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* seems to have been the only mainstream British or American newspaper to have reported on a meeting in London in November 1891 commemorating the executions, noting with horror that ‘[t]he language of the speakers was of the bitterest and most incendiary character’, that Kropotkin had ‘urged the universal adoption of Nihilist methods, such as are in vogue in Russia’, and that he had translated for Michel, who ‘declared that every means that could be adopted to fight capitalism was justifiable’.<sup>63</sup> The *Tribune* paired this article with one calling the commemorations in Chicago a danger to public order.<sup>64</sup> Later, only the *Tribune* reported Kropotkin’s plans to travel to Chicago in 1893, although ultimately he decided not to travel.<sup>65</sup> It seems unlikely that Kropotkin encouraged violence in his 1891 speech and it seems likely that, had he done so, it would have attracted the attention of the British press.

Kropotkin represented ‘foreign’ anarchist violence and Chicago’s immigrant communities were vilified as importers of violence, even though most of the city’s immigrants came from Germany. Similar criticisms of Kropotkin and immigrants appeared in the local press in San Francisco, home to the largest Russian community in the US. In November 1887, as the anniversary of the anarchists’ execution approached, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* responded to Kropotkin’s recent comments:

The Nihilists of Russia and the Anarchists who have come to this country from various parts of Europe hold essentially the same principles. They believe in the destruction of all who stand in their way, not in the gradual dissemination of their doctrines by argument and the complete exposition of their principles by means of printed publications. The father of the present Czar of Russia was murdered by Nihilists. The fatal bomb did the work. It was the fatal bomb that destroyed the lives of several policemen in Chicago. A more diabolical murder was never committed in this country. No sympathy for these Anarchists can obscure that fact.<sup>66</sup>

Though Kropotkin's public comments on terrorism were broadly sympathetic, he added nuance to his image as a dangerous terrorist by clarifying his views. He began to shape this image during his trial and the early months of his imprisonment, using his speeches at the trial and in meetings with reporters despatched to uncover the 'real' Kropotkin.<sup>67</sup> He denied advocating 'revolution by violence in France', claimed to use the word dynamite 'metaphorically', and, in a long speech in his own defence, denied the existence of an international terrorist conspiracy.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, he also reportedly claimed, that if forced 'to choose between extinction or a resort to dynamite, he would, he declared, employ the latter'.<sup>69</sup> He contributed to émigré revolutionary discourse suggesting that Russia was a unique case, requiring the use of violence. As a result, sympathisers such as the American writer Mark Twain and the British socialist and trade unionist Tom Mann, declared that they would have become terrorists had they been Russians.<sup>70</sup>

Kropotkin's increasing influence on his own public image occurred against a backdrop of growing sympathy for Russian revolutionary terrorism abroad. Explanations of the motivations for assassinating Tsar Alexander II in 1881 played a similar role in shaping public opinion.<sup>71</sup> Negative representations of the tsarist regime shaped foreigners' attitudes towards Russian revolutionary terrorism. Journalists were highly critical of Kropotkin's prosecution and conviction in France.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Sergei Stepniak's book *Underground Russia* reclaimed the terms terrorist and nihilist to rehabilitate the image of terrorism in Russia in foreign media. The term nihilist would often later be qualified with terminology such as 'of the violent type', though even this was less loaded with criticism. The press continued to implicate Kropotkin when reporting on Russians' supposed terrorist conspiracies, but commentary was more sympathetic of the barriers to fighting the tsarist autocracy legally.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, shifting views of Kropotkin illustrate that media representations of terrorism were shaped by perceptions of whether terrorism was something happening far away or immediately threatening their own reality. Once it became accepted that Kropotkin was not exporting terrorism, he could be constructed as a more sympathetic figure.

Ruth Kinna has problematised the contrast often made between the 'good' Kropotkin and other 'bad' anarchists such as Bakunin over their views on violence.<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings have further demonstrated that it is important to consider revolutionary violence as relative to state violence in anarchist thought of the period.<sup>75</sup> Kropotkin was by no means unique globally among anarchists of the period, among whom there were others whose views on violence were similarly nuanced.<sup>76</sup> Although many theorists and historians have sought to dissociate Kropotkin and terrorism, making such a distinction overshadows the

associations contemporaries made. Kropotkin was not enthusiastic about terrorism, but he nevertheless was not an outspoken critic of it. Foreign observers of this period also saw terrorism in nuanced terms. It was not so much that Kropotkin became dissociated with terrorism, but that Russian revolutionary terrorism came to be viewed more sympathetically and the Anglophone press represented him as more distant from terrorism outside of the Russian Empire.

## THE ANARCHIST PRINCE AND GRANDFATHER OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Kropotkin's incarceration in Clairvaux was a catalyst for growing sympathy for him and criticism of his harsh treatment in prison.<sup>77</sup> In this period, Kropotkin's social status came to represent his unthreatening image; he became the 'Anarchist Prince'. Kropotkin was born into an ancient and prestigious noble family in Imperial Russia and held the senior noble title of *kniiaz*, usually translated as 'prince'. Seemingly destined for an elite career in the military or administration, he chose to pursue geographical science and revolutionary activism, forfeiting his wealth, which caused journalists to praise his dedication to the revolutionary cause.<sup>78</sup> Western journalists also often referred to Kropotkin as the 'Nihilist prince', implying a connection to terrorism, but this became less problematic as time passed. The term 'Nihilism' remained associated with terrorism, but journalists portrayed Kropotkin's relation to this as fighting against an unjust tsarist regime.<sup>79</sup> Kropotkin's status, therefore, symbolised how individuals from across Russian society had come to oppose tsarist despotism. So, although aware that Kropotkin hated using the title 'Prince', newspapers continued to use it in support of the more sympathetic portrayals of the revolutionary.<sup>80</sup>

For sympathisers, Kropotkin's trial and imprisonment were unjust responses to his noble activism: 'It will show how heavily the hand of authority can be laid upon men for opinion's sake in the French Republic'.<sup>81</sup> The *Boston Daily Globe* printed a comment from Sofia Kropotkina, stating that French imperialist laws against communism and the International that had enabled the court to convict him 'on a shadow of evidence' and 'solely to give pleasure to a Russian czar'.<sup>82</sup> The French right-wing newspaper *La liberté* protested vociferously, asking if the same public figures in Britain campaigning for Kropotkin's release would 'devote their sympathy to the Irish Fenians, and other newspapers ask what reception England would give to Frenchmen petitioning clemency for the perpetrators of the Westminster explosion, some of whom perhaps are chemists as distinguished in the profession as Prince Krapotkine'.<sup>83</sup> Perceptions of distance were clearly significant, as were self-perceptions of anti-imperialism, in the US, or 'good' imperialism, in Britain. These national specificities underscored the transatlantic shift in the discourse on Kropotkin.

Growing sympathy for Peter Kropotkin is also evident in representations of Sofia Kropotkina during his trial and imprisonment. The *Boston Daily Globe* reported her giving an impassioned critique of the French state: 'It is a republic; yes, but a republic so afraid that it panders to a despot. Republic, bah'.<sup>84</sup> In 1885, repeating the description laid out by the correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, the Dundee *Evening Telegraph* reported that:

I never saw heroism in so lovable a form as in the Princess Krapotkine. I don't know what age she is. But she might be a girl in her teens, or five-and-twenty. She has the rosebud freshness of youth, the bright, soft eyes of an affectionate and high-bred dog, with splendid gleams of human intellect and soul. The upper part of her face is broad and the under narrow and refined, although her mouth, when she laughs, is wide. But she has a dazzling set of teeth to show, and her lips when in repose are beautifully modelled and fresh as newly-blown roses. Her forehead also, by its breadth, height, and whiteness, brightens up her face. She seems to have the simplicity of a little child. Nobody to look at the pretty face as mantling blushes suffuse it would think that she escapes from the irksome weight of loneliness by plunging into the study of chemistry, mathematics, electricity, botany, and other sciences. She has resided in a poor lodging at Clairvaux in its only hotel since her husband was incarcerated in the prison there. Her voice is very sweet and her accent slightly languid. She never seems excited even when her heart is brimming over with grief. It has been her happy privilege within the last year to pay a daily visit in the parlour of the jail to Prince Krapotkine.<sup>85</sup>

This description of Kropotkina echoes the depictions of the terrorist leader of the tsar's assassins Sofia Perovskaia in the British and American press and in Stepniak's *Underground Russia*, as youthful, childlike, and reserved.<sup>86</sup> The comparison of Kropotkina's appearance to that of a dog echoes a trope in fiction where women's 'gentleness, subservience, and submission' were compared to that of pet dogs.<sup>87</sup> By feminising her 'heroism' as like that of a child or pet, the Dundee *Evening Telegraph* represented Kropotkina as a figure deserving of admiration and sympathy for her suffering. This narrative of Kropotkina's suffering contributed to opposition to her husband's imprisonment.

Kropotkin's poor health in prison became a subject of concern.<sup>88</sup> Despite the fact that he would later remark in his memoirs that '[p]ersonally I have no reason whatever to complain of the years I have spent in a French prison', and his broadly positive or neutral attitude towards the conditions, his foreign sympathisers agitated

on his behalf.<sup>89</sup> The French authorities appeared to be a proxy for the tsar causing bodily harm to revolutionaries, just as they would have suffered in Russian prisons and in Siberian exile. To cause harm to Kropotkin's body was to injure the Russian revolutionary movement, whose terrorism by this time was recognised more widely as legitimate action against a despotic tsar.<sup>90</sup> Kropotkin's own behaviour in prison played an important role in the construction of this carceral violence. He carried out scientific experiments, wrote, and apparently refused to escape when he had two opportunities. He seemed to be the model prisoner, although these stories about the escapes seem to have been fictional.<sup>91</sup> At a time when campaigns for prison reform were growing, Kropotkin's treatment also violated accepted humanitarian standards. As a result, the liberty and health of Kropotkin's body became significant to a wide range of sympathisers, forming the basis of interests which would re-emerge after his return to Russia in 1917. A focus on Kropotkin's body illustrates, as in the work of Federico Ferretti on his publishing activities, there was a constant thread linking the different periods of Kropotkin's media image. His life can be understood in more subtle ways than his mere location.<sup>92</sup> In Kropotkin's case, the link between the different periods were foreign perceptions of the Russian revolutionary movement. His media image was embedded in these wider perceptions. We can also see how Kropotkin's image transcended his locations, as his 'saintly scholar' image, as George Woodcock and Ivan Akumović put it, was already well-established before he set foot in England.<sup>93</sup>

After his early release from prison in 1886, Kropotkin travelled to Britain where he mostly lived before returning to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917, which eliminated the threat of the tsarist regime to revolutionaries. Kropotkin's scientific and editorial work prior to and during his imprisonment provided networks to support his employment in Britain and, as Federico Ferretti suggests, these networks cannot be understood as distinct from Kropotkin's political activism.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, his scientific and anarchist writings themselves were interconnected endeavours.<sup>95</sup> Appreciation of Kropotkin's views on various topics in publications with both moderate liberal and conservative political leanings indicates the broad appeal he established through these interlinked activities.<sup>96</sup> Kropotkin's 1902 book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, which had first appeared as a series of articles in *The Nineteenth Century*, epitomises this weaving of scientific method, historical and sociological analysis.<sup>97</sup> Kropotkin's optimistic model of societal development that was widely popular.<sup>98</sup>

Kropotkin's willingness to engage with a wide range of political figures, thinkers, and activists stemmed, as Pascale Siegrist has set out, from his cosmopolitanism, his belief in the need to participate in a 'global moral community', transcending spatial politics.<sup>99</sup> Kropotkin lectured widely on political, social, and economic topics and his books attracted praise, though reviewers were often sceptical of his politics.<sup>100</sup> He also

entered into extensive correspondences with revolutionaries and radicals, Russians and foreigners, geographers and scientists, who respected his intellectual authority.<sup>101</sup> Kropotkin's existing connections in Britain included the Newcastle newspaper proprietor and Radical MP Joseph Cowen.<sup>102</sup> Cowen introduced Kropotkin to influential figures on the British left, including Henry Hyndman, who had supported a petition for improving Kropotkin's conditions in prison alongside scientists and intellectuals.<sup>103</sup> Kropotkin arrived in Britain with sufficient connections to support himself, but also to lend a respected voice to other Russian émigrés' campaigns. He helped found the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom and Russian Free Press Fund with former close revolutionary colleagues from St Petersburg, though he was not an official member of either or entirely committed to their programme.<sup>104</sup> Though there were some on the more radical left who supported Kropotkin, the Society, and the Fund for political reasons, their campaigns against tsarism were also popular with humanitarian and social campaigners in Britain and the US.<sup>105</sup> Prominent women's suffrage campaigners, including Julia Ward Howe and Alice Stone Blackwell in the US, were also often drawn to the movement.<sup>106</sup> Together, these organisations and Kropotkin influenced narratives about Russia and the revolutionary movement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Britain and America. Kropotkin helped establish enduring narratives of an evil tsarist autocracy which encouraged foreigners to campaign against the tsarist regime, particularly on issues relating to the treatment of political prisoners and exiles.<sup>107</sup> He disagreed with them on a wide range of issues, including the role of propaganda abroad for the revolutionary movement, but they made useful colleagues.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Kropotkin's expertise and reputation as a scientist and theorist granted him entry into political and social circles through which he could promote the Russian revolutionary cause.

Though anarchist bombings in France and Spain in the 1890s might have destabilised Kropotkin's sympathetic public image, some saw the blame he attracted as unfair: 'He is held responsible, too – and this is the cruellest touch – for crimes which he has no power to prevent'.<sup>109</sup> The press represented Kropotkin as a different kind of anarchist to those who practiced violence: 'The warm reception which was given to Kropotkin, not only in New York but in and around Boston, is a gratifying illustration of the fact that people are learning to discriminate between the revolutionary and philosophical anarchists, who are far apart indeed in aims and purposes'.<sup>110</sup> Journalists also distinguished between *Narodnaia volia*, the assassins of the tsar, and anarchist terrorists.<sup>111</sup> In 1899, several local and national newspapers reproduced a passage about the assassination of Tsar Alexander II the English edition of Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, indicating Russian terrorism remained of particular interest.<sup>112</sup> Kropotkin's memoirs sustained familiar narratives of tsarist despotism and engaged a readership already sympathetic to the Russian revolutionary

cause, clearly seen as distinct to western European anarchist terrorisms.

Sofia Kropotkina played an important role in popularising anti-tsarist narratives in Britain both during and after her husband's imprisonment yet is often overlooked. At the time of her husband's trial, her criticisms that it was all an unjust charade appeared in newspapers.<sup>113</sup> Her short story 'The Wife of No. 4327' was published in the American anarchist journal *Liberty* in five parts in the spring of 1886. Benjamin Tucker, the journal's editor, had translated himself various anarchist texts, including some of Kropotkin's essays, for publication in the journal and was a long-term supporter of the Russian revolutionary movement.<sup>114</sup> The story depicted the arbitrary inhumanity of the French prison system as experienced by the wife of a prisoner. Kropotkina also expresses despair at how the state controls her husband's body: 'Even dead, she had no right in him'.<sup>115</sup> Although Kropotkina's presence in the British and American press is much rarer, and her story went largely unacknowledged in the mainstream press, she was clearly of enough interest that a small number of British newspapers announced her serious illness with typhoid in 1887.<sup>116</sup>

Susan Hinely notes that it was the anarchist Charlotte Wilson who 'brokered a teaching and speaking career' for Sofia Kropotkina in Britain.<sup>117</sup> However, Kropotkina's status as a 'Princess' provided a source of interest, just as her husband was called a 'Prince'. Kropotkina lectured regularly across Britain on Russian social and political issues.<sup>118</sup> Audiences responded to Kropotkina as an expert in her own right; her suffering as an exile was also recognised.<sup>119</sup> An article in the Dundee *Evening Telegraph and Post* about Kropotkina's upcoming visit and lecture in November 1907, though focused primarily on her husband, acknowledged the role played by women in the revolutionary movement: '[they] are often selected for the most difficult and dangerous tasks, tasks which, whether successful or not, are bound to issue in death'.<sup>120</sup> Kropotkina was never presented as a terrorist herself in Anglophone print culture, as her husband was, but her activism shaped this middle period in transnational imaginings of the Russian Revolution.

The 1905 Revolution in Russia prompted renewed interest in the Russian revolutionary movement, despite the difficulties it caused for smuggling Russian-language propaganda into the Russian Empire and its fast dissolution in the face of tsarist repression.<sup>121</sup> Peter Kropotkin used this opportunity to leverage his reputation to shape interpretations in Britain, which spread across the Anglophone Atlantic world. In 1908, he wrote two letters to *The Times* newspaper protesting the harsh conditions within the Siberian exile system and the rising numbers of executions in Russia.<sup>122</sup> He supported the work of the Parliamentary Russian Committee (PRC) that campaigned against the brutalities of tsarist rule and whose members included MPs, members of the House of Lords, and representatives from the fields

of journalism, university education (mainly historians), social reformers, and both the Church of England and un-established churches. In 1909, the PRC campaigned against the planned visit by the tsar to Britain and published a pamphlet by Kropotkin titled 'The Terror in Russia'. Kropotkin emphasised that tsarist state violence was not a proportionate response to revolutionary violence, but instead state violence had come first. In a letter to *The Times* in 1909, Kropotkin wrote: 'You thus see, Sir, that the terrorism of the Government was not an answer to the revolutionary terrorism. The latter was a reply to the former'.<sup>123</sup> Kropotkin's evidence for the despotism was the regime's cruel and barbaric treatment of its people, in prisons, in exile, and in the army.<sup>124</sup> Though Kropotkin did not advocate terrorism as a response to this despotism, through this campaign he sought to recover the memory and interpretation of Russian revolutionary terrorism from its critics.

This activism meant that by 1909, although Kropotkin was still called a terrorist, his anarchist thought was no longer universally closely associated with terrorism, as a review of his book, *The Conquest of Bread* illustrates:

The anarchists of the newspaper and the novel, who occasionally murder a Sovereign or a President, but more often kill a number of innocent bystanders, are either weak-minded fanatics or common criminals who have picked up a theory spun by more ingenious brains than their own and use it as a justification of their criminal acts. The real anarchists never do anything of the kind, or, indeed, anything at all, except talk and write; they theorize and lead blameless or harmless lives, at least in act.<sup>125</sup>

As the twentieth century progressed, Kropotkin's age and experience became integral elements of his public image. He became the 'grandfather of the Russian revolution' alongside Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia's 'grandmother'.<sup>126</sup> Both were cast as the sympathetic victims of tsarist oppression.<sup>127</sup> Such representations drew on wider British and American political culture of the period. In late-nineteenth-century British political culture, the image of the 'Grand Old Man' in politics derived from William Ewart Gladstone. While the moniker satirised and criticised him, even to denote his increasing irrelevance in old age, it still formed the basis of a cult of personality. The name was also as a mark of respect for several of Gladstone's contemporaries.<sup>128</sup> During the same period in British politics, the moniker 'Father of the House' gained its contemporary meaning as the longest-serving MP. As a result, we can see the growing cult of personality related to age which forms the basis of these later representations of Kropotkin. A similar cult of age emerged in US politics, with the Dean of the House of Representatives attaining symbolic seniority through long service.

When the February Revolution arrived, Kropotkin was again well placed to comment on ongoing events. On 31 March 1917, two meetings in London marked the February Revolution, one at the Royal Albert Hall and the other at the Kingsway Hall at which a message from Kropotkin concerning the recent events was read. At the latter, which was attended by many Russians, Kropotkin's message noted the 'unanimity' of the revolution and attributed the events to German imperialism and its infiltration of the tsarist regime through the tsarina. Kropotkin called to protect the gains of the revolution from the German army and secure Russia's future. At the Kingsway Hall, the message was read by J. Frederick Green, a former secretary of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. A third meeting took place that same evening at the Queen's Hall and, while it is unclear if Kropotkin's message was read there too, that meeting was addressed by David Soskice, another close colleague of Kropotkin.<sup>129</sup> At this moment, Kropotkin offered hope for the future and again presented a vision of the Revolution which would satisfy British interests during the ongoing war. Kropotkin's supposed approval of the Revolution accompanied praise for the 'order and restraint' of events in Russia in one newspaper report.<sup>130</sup> Kropotkin welcomed his role as commentator and in May 1917 became chairman of the newly founded Committee for Correct Information about Russia.<sup>131</sup> When journalists in 1917 looked to account for ongoing events in Russia, they turned to Kropotkin for their knowledge of tsarist oppression, for example referring to Kropotkin's 1909 pamphlet for the Parliamentary Russian Committee.<sup>132</sup>

Through Kropotkin, foreign sympathisers came to see the Russian Revolution as a transnational, collaborative effort of Russian revolutionaries and foreign sympathisers. By 'rescuing' Kropotkin from persecution and imprisonment in France, enabling him to settle in Britain, which prided itself on its liberal attitude towards political refugees, British sympathisers felt affinity to his person, body, and intellect.<sup>133</sup> Kropotkin lay at the centre of an 'imagined community', which transcended geography, nationality, and politics.<sup>134</sup> Through Kropotkin, British sympathisers felt they were part of the February Revolution. One person, who had known Kropotkin for a long time, wrote to him and he thanked her for her 'kind words', expressing his regret that they could not share the 'joy' with her husband who had also worked for the cause.<sup>135</sup> The author of this letter was Elizabeth Spence Watson who, with her now-deceased husband, had actively supported the Russian revolutionary cause in Britain, including terrorist propagandists such as Sergei Stepniak. It was this sense of personal investment in the Russian revolutionary cause that Kropotkin facilitated through his extensive correspondences and which laid the foundations for later opposition to Bolshevik power among his foreign sympathisers.

## 'WITHERED HOPE'

After the February Revolution, there was a sense of great hope for the future and Kropotkin's role in it. When Kropotkin was reportedly invited back to Petrograd to assist 'the work of reconstruction', the *New York Times* printed a report in which the Russian people were said to be 'walking in a hushed sense of benediction'.<sup>136</sup> This soon changed after October. It became clear that individuals such as Kropotkin and other celebrities of the Russian revolutionary emigration were, at best, tolerated by the new regime.<sup>137</sup> It seemed inconceivable to the British and American publics that those who had suffered under the tsarist regime were now being harassed by the Bolsheviks. The *New York Times* printed an incredulous letter about support for Trotsky at a recent Socialist convention in December 1917 in New York: 'Do they realize that this "friend Trotzky" considers the real revolutionists, such as Prince Kropotkin, Mme. Breshkovskaya, and Plechanov as counter-revolutionists, and had arrested men who had given half of their lives to the cause of the revolution, some of them who have spent at least thirty years in the prisons of Siberia?'<sup>138</sup> When Kropotkin was reported to have been arrested in mid-1918, the *Observer* reprinted an article by Swedish socialist Anna Lindhagan describing him as 'the personification of sacrifice, ability, idealism, and honesty in words and deeds' and his arrest as 'a cruel thrust into the heart of the entire civilised world'.<sup>139</sup> Kropotkin became a tool with which to criticise the Bolshevik regime.

Although hindered by difficult living conditions and increasing ill health, Kropotkin's voice continued to be heard through the visits of friends and sympathisers to his cottage in Dmitrov, where he had moved from Moscow. The geography and cultural significance of incarceration had been upended by Civil War. Instead of being exiled to Siberia, Kropotkin's exile to Dmitrov became a symbolic incarceration. Visitors making the pilgrimage to Kropotkin's home described the journey as being like one into hell, fraught with chaos.<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on Kropotkin's lack of food or medical care became metaphors for the Bolshevik regime's failure to nourish its population and care for Russia more widely. Through this process, the Bolshevik regime proved itself to be an illegitimate representative of the revolution as Kropotkin's jailer and executioner. In 1920, Margaret Bondfield, a member of the British Labour Delegation to Russia, brought back an appeal from Kropotkin to British workers criticising Bolshevik efforts to centralise and bureaucratised power.<sup>141</sup> Kropotkin criticised the path of the Revolution in Russia and British newspapers listened. In a letter to his friend George Brandes, printed in *L'Humanité* and reprinted in the *Manchester Guardian*, Kropotkin opposed Bolshevik violence, arguing that it brought about a 'violent and mischievous reaction'.<sup>142</sup> In a comment

on the widespread, chaotic violence, Kropotkin said: 'The bolsheviki are not socialists and the anarchists are not anarchists. They are expropriators, ordinary criminals'.<sup>143</sup> He was becoming disillusioned by the situation. Kropotkin never succeeded in convincing foreign observers that anarchism was not an inherently violent political philosophy. It did not help his efforts that the British press often referred to Bolsheviks as 'anarchists'.<sup>144</sup> As a result, as his death receded his image as a terrorist and violent anarchist caricature endured.<sup>145</sup>

Representations of Kropotkin in the British press echoed wider anti-Bolshevik narratives in the mainstream press in the years following 1917, as well as lobbying from anti-Bolshevik sympathisers and Russians forced into exile.<sup>146</sup> Anti-Bolshevism was frequently founded on the notion of connections between the Bolsheviks and the Germans in the context of the First World War and on the idea that the Bolsheviks did not represent the 'Real Russia'.<sup>147</sup> However, relations shifted in the 1920s with British recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924 (the USA did not extend recognition until 1933). Many intellectuals came eventually to see the Soviet regime in a more positive light, and some of those who had been among Kropotkin's sympathisers during his life in exile became active members of organisations such as the Society for Cultural Relations between the Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the USSR from the mid-1920s.<sup>148</sup>

As it had been during his imprisonment in France in the 1880s, during the Civil War years, Kropotkin's health became a subject of some concern. Reports provided the opportunity not only to criticise the failed promises of the new regime, but also its lack of compassion for the elderly revolutionary.<sup>149</sup> When he died, this continued. Due to the unreliability of news emerging from Russia, several newspapers printed Kropotkin's obituary on 30 or 31 January 1921.<sup>150</sup> Although he died of pneumonia, some newspapers reported that he died from starvation, or at least that the actions of the regime had contributed to his final illness.<sup>151</sup> Not only was the Bolshevik regime criticised for failing to fulfil its promises, but it seemed to foreign observers, symbolically, to be harming the embodiment of the revolution. The incarcerated Russian revolutionary body was highly symbolic in the imperial era.<sup>152</sup> Kropotkin's body similarly represented the physical link with the revolutionary past as a participant in revolutionary circles of the 1870s and political prisoner. At the same time, through his lifetime's work, he had a repository of knowledge concerning society, progress, and revolution through his academic and theoretical pursuits. Kropotkin's body was thus the vessel containing the instructions for how Russia would be remade and carried the scars of the ill-health and abuse caused by the evil tsarist regime. He was the site from which the revolution could be recreated, and his death made this symbolically impossible.

Kropotkin belonged to an age which was decaying and disappearing before the

very eyes of foreign observers. He represented its 'withered hopes'.<sup>153</sup> The Bolsheviks' ruthless commitment to the future and patronage of cultural producers such as the suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich and futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky rejected the 'bourgeois' artists, poets, and writers of the Silver Age, whose work filtered through intellectual networks linking Russian thinkers, artists, and cultural critics to those in the West.<sup>154</sup> Among the Silver Age poets was Alexander Blok, who would die in the summer of 1921, only shortly after the death of Kropotkin. Artists and intellectuals of the Russian Silver Age looked back to Russia's early nineteenth-century 'Golden Age' of literature and particularly to Alexander Pushkin. They idealised artistic production which drew on the culture of the Golden Age, including the music of Tchaikovsky. By rejecting Russian cultural and revolutionary heritage, the Bolsheviks thus rejected all which foreign sympathisers valued in the Revolution. In time, the Soviet regime would come to embrace much of the cultural heritage of the Russian nineteenth century, but the period of the *fin de siècle*, with writers such as Blok, remained beyond comprehension. Blok's contemporaries compared his death to the passing of an age, including Anna Akhmatova in her poem for his funeral 'Today is the Nameday of Our Lady of Smolensk'. The death of figures such as Kropotkin and Blok, to their respective admirers, represented the Bolsheviks' attempts to sever contemporary Russian culture from its heritage through iconoclasm and destruction.

Obituaries emphasised Kropotkin's character, as 'a Prince of both sorts: a Prince of noble blood and a Prince of noble heart'.<sup>155</sup> The Bolsheviks' aggressive pursuit of the destruction of class seemed to preclude the adoption of such values attributed to the nobility. Alongside Kropotkin, Tolstoy was prominent in Anglophone cultural imaginings of Russia in this period. Unlike among Russian intellectuals and artists such as Blok, who ruminated on the moral degeneration of the upper classes, Kropotkin and Tolstoy sought to use their privilege to improve society. Whereas Tolstoy's pacifist anarchism was widely viewed with suspicion and sometimes ridicule, his efforts to improve the life of peasants and to live simply met with respect.<sup>156</sup> As such, Kropotkin and Tolstoy represented a way in which the values of those who were privileged in the older European social and cultural order, whose decline was accelerated by the First World War, might be re-imagined. Like Kropotkin, Tolstoy's death in 1910 was an important public event in Russia, inspiring religious and national discourses which the state was powerless to control.<sup>157</sup> William Nickell has suggested that Tolstoy was perceived to have a 'universal, timeless significance', and Kropotkin seemed to transcend this same society he was born into.<sup>158</sup> Kropotkin's death similarly became a media phenomenon, but the difference in 1921 was that his generation was fading. The loss was felt acutely as those who represented the physical link with the Russian past were gone.

British and American newspapers commemorated Kropotkin as a great hero

of the revolutionary movement who had played a part in liberating Russia from the tsarist regime.<sup>159</sup> Similar responses emerged in response to the death of another famous émigré, Nikolai Tchaikovsky in 1926, who died in Britain. The *Manchester Guardian* remembered Kropotkin's old friend and revolutionary comrade as a 'social and humanitarian' activist, as opposed to a 'political' one, noting his opposition to the Bolsheviks.<sup>160</sup> Tchaikovsky, like Kropotkin was a member of an émigré generation which had successfully gathered support among foreign sympathisers for the Russian revolutionary cause. Like Kropotkin, he too had opposed Bolshevik rule, although taking a more active role in opposition.

At the time of his death, obituary writers frequently noted his links to revolutionary terrorism. However, compared to the early-1880s, journalists were less critical. The *Manchester Guardian*, which had roundly denounced Kropotkin as a dangerous terrorist at the time of his trial, instead looked upon his comment on terrorism more favourably:

As a philosophic Anarchist he did not stand with Tolstoy, relying upon moral forces alone for social reform, but believed with Marx in the occasional necessity of physical violence or the 'propaganda of the deed'. He was prepared to justify not merely revolt but even assassination if it were properly directed and had 'an idea behind it'. In the destructive work of Anarchism force had its place as 'the midwife of reform', though the constructive work of society was to be entrusted to the peaceful affectional instincts of mankind alone. The historical conditions of modern Russia visibly reacted upon his social philosophy.<sup>161</sup>

Reporting of Kropotkin's death in British and American newspapers was shaped by the media history of his life. His connections and influence in emigration enabled him to establish narratives of the Russian revolutionary movement that would come to define what foreign observers saw as legitimate revolutionary activity in Russia. While terrorism was morally objectionable to many, Kropotkin's association with these symbolic figures of the Russian revolutionary movement meant that he came to symbolise this generation upon his return to Russia in 1917. To ignore or to persecute Kropotkin was, to foreign observers, to violate the memory of the revolutionary movement.

## CONCLUSION

At the time of his death Kropotkin was the great idealist, 'the forerunner of those dreamers who sought to free Russia'.<sup>162</sup> He had inspired such hope in the activists,

reformers, and campaigners, socialists, and liberals, whom he had met abroad that money was raised to support the museum founded in the cottage in Dmitrov and run by his widow Sofia. Not only was this museum a place where Kropotkin's life and work would be remembered, it also hosted lectures on 'scientific and moral' subjects.<sup>163</sup> Even beyond his death, Kropotkin would continue to symbolise the path that revolution might have taken and the ideal of scientific advances and the improvement of the human condition. Sofia Kropotkina continued to be a great force in the memory of her husband and despite the discord between her late husband's political theories and the politics of the Soviet regime, she managed to keep the museum in Dmitrov open until her death.<sup>164</sup> Her role in this is a reminder of her work throughout her life promoting her husband's image, though, her political activism in her own right should not be forgotten.

The enduring fascination with Kropotkin, or what he represented to his admirers, was the product of the narrative of his life and representations of his mind and body in contemporary media. These media narratives can be read as an allegory of the Russian Revolution in the transatlantic Anglophone imagination. From his early infamy emerged a lasting association with revolutionary terrorism, whose image dominated representations of the Russian revolutionary movement until 1917, and even beyond. As Kropotkin aged, so did the revolutionary movement. It matured, its ideas developed, its figureheads became elderly activists whose revolutionary credentials were respected, having been gained in a distant, mythologised past. Then, when October 1917 came around, it quickly became clear that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were not interested in the kind of revolution and future society proposed by Kropotkin and other members of this older generation of revolutionaries. They seemed to be abandoning revolutionary history as embodied in Kropotkin and tied to the values of nineteenth-century Russian culture. Such an image of Kropotkin as an icon of anarchist culture endures today as a warning to those on the left who place their trust in the power of the state.

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## NOTES

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  - 3 Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (Mineola NY, 2003), p191.
  - 4 Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p227.
  - 5 Ibid., p231.
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  - 7 Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 19, 3 (1987): 373-90.
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  - 9 Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin*, (Chicago, 1976); Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (Bloomington IN, 2017); Robert Henderson, *Vladimir Burtsev and the Struggle for a Free Russia: A Revolutionary in the Time of Tsarism and Bolshevism* (London, 2017).
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  - 11 Matthew S. Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2015).
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  - 15 Nicholson, 'Digital Turn', pp64-7; Smits, 'TS Tools', pp142-4; Marlene Manoff, 'Mapping Archival Silence: Technology and the Historical Record', in Fiorella Foscari et al. (eds), *Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories* (Cambridge, 2016), pp66-8.
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- 18 'About Chronicling America', <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/about/> [viewed 22/02/2021].
- 19 Adrian Bingham, for example, criticises the use of single, readily accessible digitised titles (*The Times*) to represent 'press opinion'. Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, 1 (2010), p229.
- 20 Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison WI, 1992).
- 21 Space devoted to news relating to crimes, courts, accidents, and deaths in American newspapers grew across the nineteenth century. Baldasty, *Commercialization of News*, p123.
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